



U.S. AGENCY FOR
GLOBAL MEDIA

UNITED STATES
BROADCASTING
BOARD OF
GOVERNORS

Countering Russian Disinformation

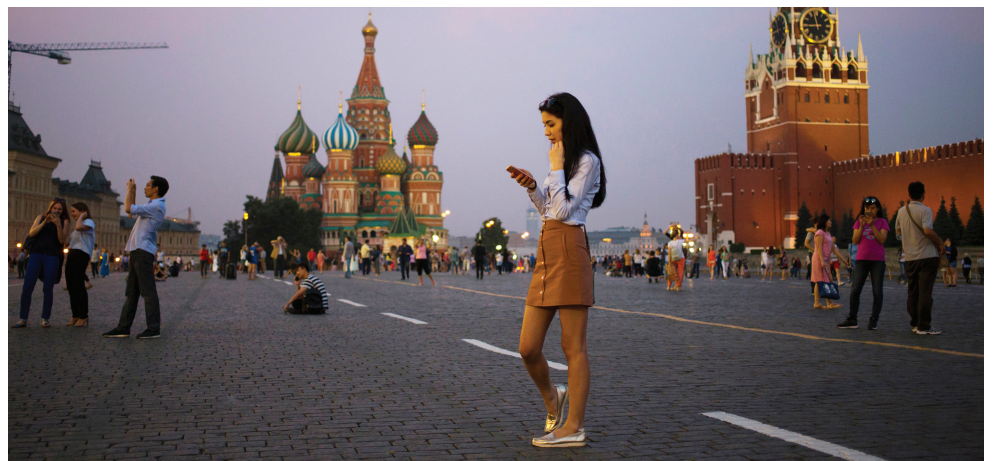
Government control over Russian media outlets has devastated independent media sources, especially on television, where virtually no alternative information sources are available. Russian media inundate audiences with disinformation about global events and depict the United States on an irreversible downward social spiral, with its institutions failing and global strength on the wane. Disinformation campaigns are coordinated among state-funded TV channels, social media platforms, internet services, and so-called trolls to fulfill the Kremlin's goal of countering what Moscow regards as "Western influence." Media laws as well as self-censorship contribute to a repressive media environment.

35+

NUMBER OF PROGRAMS
ADDED FOR AUDIENCES
IN RUSSIA AND ITS
PERIPHERY SINCE
2014

7.4
MILLION

USAGM MEASURED
UNDUPLICATED
WEEKLY AUDIENCE OF
ADULTS IN RUSSIA



RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE PROGRAMMING

The U.S. Agency of Global Media (USAGM) provides multiple fact-based, independent alternative media sources to the Kremlin spin. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine and attempted annexation of Crimea in 2014, the USAGM has added or expanded 35+ programs for audiences in Russia and its periphery.

The strength of this USAGM effort comes from the combination of radio, television and digital programming from the traditional Russian services in the Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), in the form of *Current Time*, a 24/7 Russian-language television and digital network, led by RFE/RL in cooperation with VOA. VOA Russian and RFE/RL Radio Svoboda attract older, well educated, liberal Russian audiences, but *Current Time* brings younger, more social-media savvy audience members into the mix.

27+

CURRENT TIME IS
SEEN IN MORE THAN
27 COUNTRIES

CURRENT TIME

Current Time reaches Russian speakers in and around Russia, and distribution is available worldwide through affiliate relationships, and regionally through on-demand platforms, and satellites covering Russia. More than 84 distributors in 19 countries air the channel in full, and an additional 49 affiliates in 15 countries carry specific programs. RFE/RL has the lead in producing the Current Time network with daily news programs on Russia, Europe and Central Asia, in addition to other business and cultural programs. VOA contributes a Monday-Friday program called *Current Time America* and a Saturday program called *Current Time Itogi* featuring news from the United States and also coverage of U.S. political events. Current Time has been hailed for its curation of independent Russian documentaries.

VOA

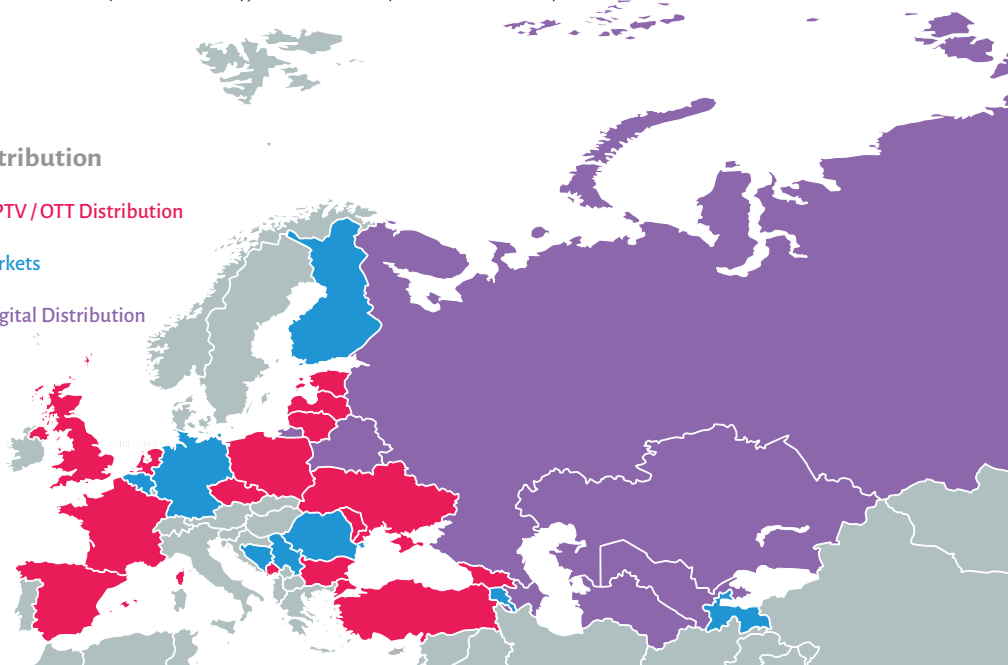
Given changes in media consumption and denial of direct distribution by Russian authorities, VOA Russian has employed a digital-first strategy with video streaming, social media, expert blogs, and user-generated content. VOA Russian provides in-depth coverage on events in the United States, US-Russia relations, Russian diaspora, and global news.

RFE/RL

RFE/RL *Svoboda* focuses its coverage on news in and around Russia. *Svoboda* programming provides analysis on Russian current affairs, politics, social issues, human rights, and culture, in addition investigative pieces not covered by domestic Russian media. RFE/RL also covers news in the Tatar, Bashkir, and Chechen languages, and provides digital coverage of local news for residents of politically-sensitive regions of the Russian Federation, such as the North Caucasus (*Caucasus.Realities*), mid-Volga (*Idel.Realities*), and Siberia (*Siberia.Realities*).

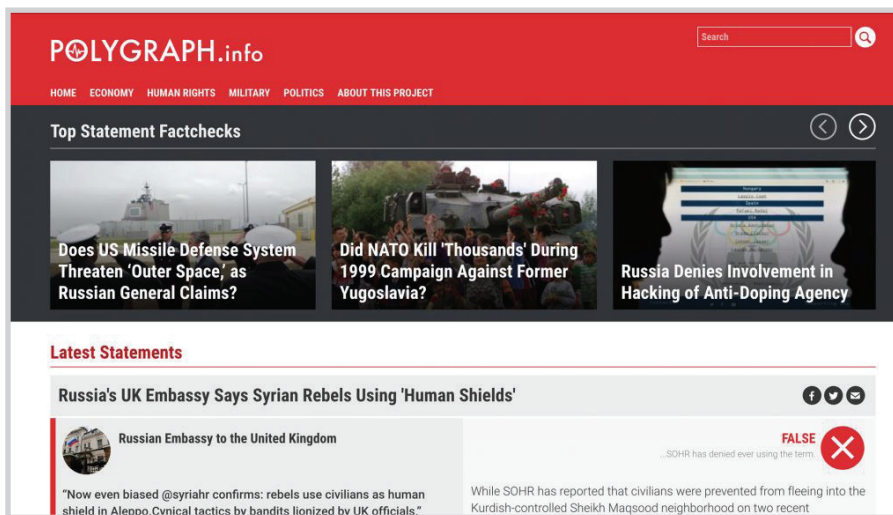
Current Time Distribution

- Active Cable / IPTV / OTT Distribution
- Prospective Markets
- Satellite and Digital Distribution



FACT-CHECKING PLATFORMS

VOA and RFE/RL have launched English and Russian-language fact-checking websites—*Polygraph* and *Faktograf*, respectively—to identify false or misleading information. Journalists investigate stories to provide professionally verified information and help audiences improve media literacy.



IMPACT

USAGM has a measured unduplicated weekly audience of 4.9 percent of adults in Russia (last survey conducted in 2016). VOA has a weekly audience of 3.1 percent (3.5M) and RFE/RL has a weekly audience of 3.5 percent (3.9M). More than half of VOA Russian audience members share content with others, and nearly half of RFE/RL Svoboda audience members say they discuss with others stories covered by the network. What is most impressive is USAGM's credibility in Russia. Both networks have credibility ratings in the mid-60s, a significant measure of trust in an incredibly difficult media market.

With the introduction of Current Time, additional research will be needed to assess the impact of Russian-language programming. Based on initial digital metrics, the network is having a significant effect. In 2017, more than half the network's 400 million online video views came from inside Russia. Since its launch in March 2017, Current Time has earned more than 1.3 million followers across all social media platforms. Current Time's Facebook and Twitter pages register 100,000 engagements (comments, likes, and shares) monthly.

FOREIGN AGENT DESIGNATION IN RUSSIA

In November 2017, Russia passed legislation to allow the government to designate media outlets receiving funding from abroad as "foreign agents" and impose sanctions on them. Just days later, in early December 2017, the Russian Justice Ministry designated RFE/RL's Russian Service and Tatar-Bashkir Service, Voice of America, Current Time, *Faktograf*, *Siberia.Realities*, *Idel.Realities*, *Caucasus.Realities*, and *Crimea.Realities* as "foreign mass media performing the functions of a foreign agent."

1.3
MILLION
FOLLOWERS

ACROSS ALL
SOCIAL MEDIA
PLATFORMS
FOR CURRENT TIME

400
MILLION
ONLINE
VIDEO
VIEWS

100
THOUSAND
ENGAGEMENTS
(COMMENTS, LIKES,
AND SHARES)

“Independent journalism brings clear, unfiltered news to the people who need it. It’s is really that simple. We want people to make informed decisions. And we believe that when given the chance, this method definitely plays a major role in demystifying Russian narratives.”

—John Lansing, CEO, USAGM

In 2018, judicial proceedings and punitive rulings against RFE/RL by the Russian government were met with strong responses. The major international news agencies, and even some Russian media, covered the court case and RFE/RL’s statements in its own defense; the U.S. Department of State has condemned “the selective targeting” of RFE/RL. Meanwhile, RFE/RL has complied to the new law to the best of its ability. Perhaps more troublesome, the Russian State Duma is debating legislation expanding the reach for its “foreign agents” designation.

Russia falsely characterizes its actions as reciprocity for the foreign agent registration requirements placed on Russia’s RT and Sputnik outlets by the U.S. Department of Justice. While Russian media, including RT and Sputnik, are free to operate in the United States and are carried by U.S. cable television outlets and FM radio stations, U.S. global media, including VOA and RFE/RL, are banned from state-run television and radio in Russia. Current Time is only now beginning to place some of its programs with independent cable and digital media outlets in Russia. Further U.S. international media are protected by a legislated firewall that guarantees the editorial independence of their content. Therefore, neither VOA nor RFE/RL nor anyone who works for them is an agent of the U.S. government. The Russian Justice Ministry’s “foreign agent” designations are clearly a political attack on an influential U.S. Institution and an attempt to discredit the accurate, reliable news USAGM networks provide to Russian-speaking audiences every day.

JOURNALISTS UNDER THREAT

Russia has targeted RFE/RL journalists and their families, subjecting them to physical assault, imprisonment, court convictions, arbitrary detention, interrogation, stalking, verbal assault, online threats, and seizure of equipment. Among the most serious cases, RFE/RL contributor Mykola Semena is serving a 2.5 year suspended sentence following a conviction on “separatism” charges in Crimea, and is barred from working as a journalist during this period. RFE/RL contributor Stanislav Aseyev remains in the custody of Russia-backed separatists who kidnapped Aseyev in Ukraine’s eastern Donetsk region in June 2017.

09/2018



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